The State of New Hampshire
DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES

Thomas S. Burack, Commissioner

March 8, 2007

The Honorable James G. Phinizy, Chairman
Environment and Agriculture Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 303
Concord, NH 03301

RE: HB 699 Relative to Establishing a Commission to Study Methods and Costs of Sewage, Sludge, and Septage Disposal

Dear Chairman Phinizy:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 699, which seeks to establish a commission to study methods and costs of sewage, sludge and septage disposal. The Department of Environmental Services (DES) supports the passage of this bill.

Sewage is water-carried waste from homes and businesses that is discharged to publicly owned wastewater plants for treatment. The vast majority of wastewater treatment plants in New Hampshire were built in the 1970s, largely with federal grant monies provided under the Clean Water Act. These plants, now over 30 years old, are reaching the end of their life expectancy. New Hampshire has experienced unprecedented growth and development in the last 20 years which have only served to compound the problems of an aging wastewater infrastructure. During the 2006 Legislative session, HB 1491 was adopted which established a study commission that is currently in the process of assessing the needs of wastewater treatment plants in the state. This study commission will be submitting its findings in a report to the Legislature on November 1, 2007.

Septage is material that is removed from septic tanks, cess pools and other sewage treatment storage units. Currently, New Hampshire generates approximately 100 million gallons of septage annually for disposal (see attached chart). Annually, approximately 22 million gallons of New Hampshire's septage is disposed at unlined septage lagoons or at innovative/alternative treatment facilities, or is land applied. Except for land application, these other management methods still result in septage solids that must be further managed. The remaining 78 million gallons of New Hampshire's septage is disposed at wastewater treatment plants, where the septage solids become part of the sludge generated by the treatment plant.

In the last decade, approximately 80% of new development in New Hampshire has taken place in areas that lack public sewer systems. As a result, residential and commercial septage disposal capacity has not kept pace with septage generation at wastewater treatment plants in the state. Municipalities have a statutory responsibility to provide or assure access to septage disposal for their residents in accordance with RSA 485-A:5-b.

Sludge is the solid or semi-solid material produced by water or wastewater treatment processes. Typically, sludge management costs are significant and represent more than 40% of the operating budget for a wastewater treatment plant. In New Hampshire, sludge is managed through land application, landfilling, and incineration (see attached chart). The state's wastewater treatment plants generate more than 120 thousand tons of sludge annually.

Municipalities are currently grappling with the problems of managing sewage, sludge and septage. A healthy environmental infrastructure is integral to protecting New Hampshire's water resources. The commission to be established under HB 699 would assist the Legislature and municipalities across the state in better understanding the various management options available for sewage, sludge and septage, as well as the cost effectiveness of those options. Based on the commission's work, longer term policy options for the handling of these wastes may be considered.

Thank you for your consideration on this issue. If you have any questions please contact me at 271-2958 or Patricia Hannon at 271-2758.

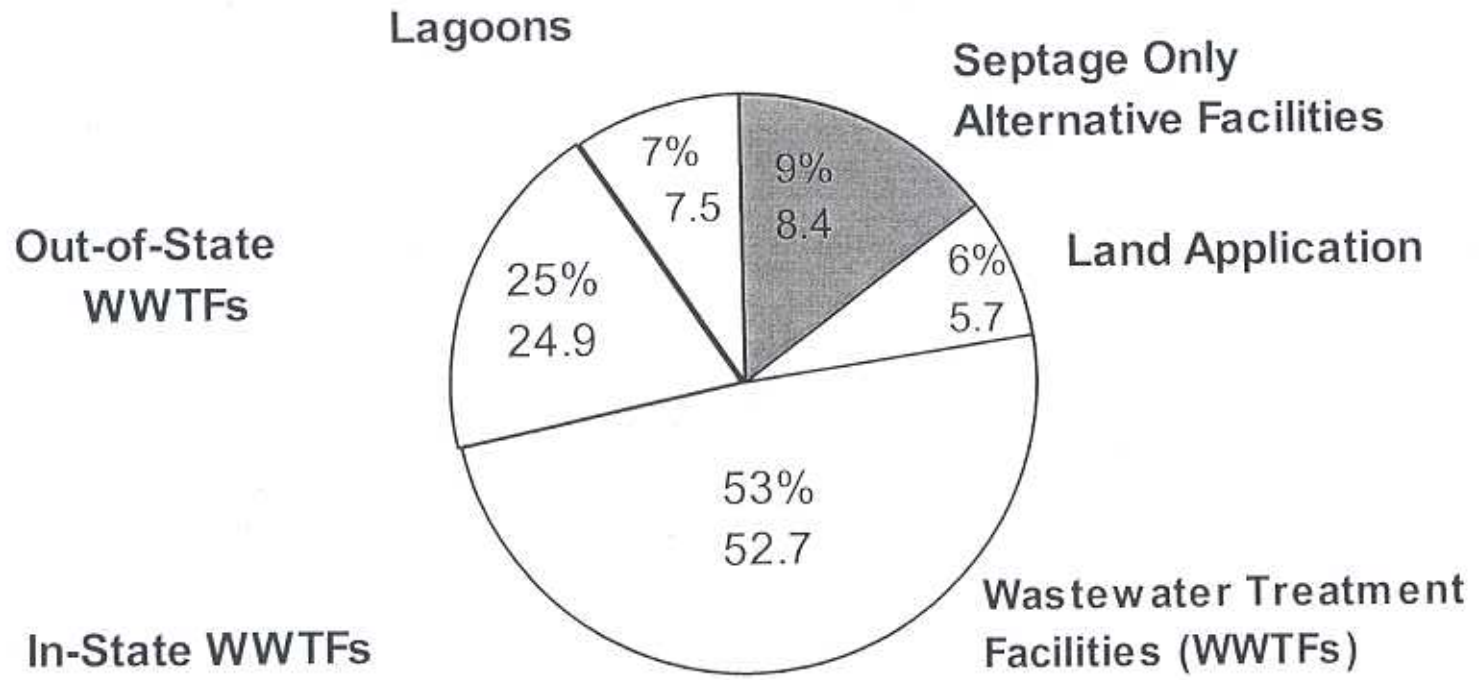
Sincerely,

for Thomas S. Burack, Asst. Comm.
Commissioner

Attachments
cc:
Rep. Beaulieu
Rep. Merrick
Rep. Quandt
Rep. Spang
Sen. Fuller Clark
Sen. Kenney

Septage Disposal Practices 2005

99.2 Million Gallons (MG)



NH Sludge and Biosolids Disposal Practices 2005 (Based on 121,390 wet tons/yr. generated)